

What is claimed is:

1. A method using a computing system and a plurality of software modules, the method assisting in making procurement decisions in an enterprise regarding a particular item
5 and comprising the steps of:

extracting via one or more software modules first information indicative of the price and/or availability of the particular item from at least one source external to the enterprise, the external source offering for sell to the enterprise and/or other entities one or more items including the particular item;

10 extracting via one or more software modules second information from the enterprise regarding existing inventory of the particular item, existing purchase arrangements between the enterprise and one or more suppliers and/or forecasted need for the particular item by the enterprise;

storing the first information and second information in a database;

15 analyzing via the first information and second information with one or more software modules;

generating a recommended action regarding the procurement or non-procurement of the particular item and/or the one or more substitute items; and

20 displaying the recommended action regarding the procurement or non-procurement of the particular item and/or the one or more substitute items.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of displaying at least selected portions of the first information and/or second information to a user.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the first information and the second information are transformed prior to storage in the database, wherein the first information and the second information are stored in a form wherein external information external to the enterprise and
25 internal information internal to the enterprise are retrievable from the database in response to one or more queries to the database.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the retrieved external and internal information are commonly displayed to a user, wherein the user may simultaneously observe, relative to the particular item, external information from a plurality of sources external to the enterprise and internal information from a plurality of sources internal to the enterprise.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the retrieved external and internal information are selectively displayed in a form determined in response to one or more commands to the computing system.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the retrieved external and internal information are displayable in a plurality of forms.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the retrieved external and internal information are displayed in a first form for review by a user responsible for making procurement decisions in the enterprise, wherein the retrieved external and internal information is displayed in a second form by a user responsible for making product design decisions in the enterprise.

8. The method of claim 4, wherein a user responsible for making procurement decisions in the enterprise and a user responsible for making product design decisions in the enterprise access the retrieved external and internal information.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the user responsible for making procurement decisions in the enterprise and the user responsible for making product design decisions in the enterprise collaborate with respect to whether the particular item is included in the design of a product that is in the process of being designed by the enterprise.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein one or more software modules generate information indicative of an estimated manufacturing cost of the product.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein one or more software modules generate information indicative of an estimated profit from sales of the product.

12. The method of claim 8, wherein the user responsible for making procurement decisions in the enterprise and the user responsible for making product design decisions in the enterprise collaborate with respect to whether the particular item should be substituted with an alternative item.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein one or more software modules generate information indicative of estimated manufacturing costs of the product based on whether the particular item or the alternative item is included in the design of the product.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein one or more software modules generate information indicative of an estimated profit from sales of the product based on whether the particular item or the alternative item is included in the design of the product.

15. The method of claim 8, wherein the user responsible for making procurement decisions in the enterprise and the user responsible for making product design decisions in the enterprise access the retrieved external and internal information using a common computing system and set of software modules.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the computing system comprises a plurality of computers interconnected via a network.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein a plurality of software modules are provided on the computing system, wherein a first set of software modules are selected for the user responsible for making procurement decisions in the enterprise, and a second set of software modules are selected for the user responsible for making product design decisions in the enterprise.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the first set and second set contain common software modules.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the first set of software modules provide a first set of data retrieval, discover, alert, display, analysis, recommendation and/or execution tools particular to the user responsible for making procurement decisions in the enterprise, wherein the second set of software modules provide a second set of data retrieval, discover, alert, display, analysis, recommendation and/or execution tools particular to user responsible for making product design decisions in the enterprise.

20. The method of claim 4, wherein the user simultaneously observes information indicative of estimated demand within the enterprise for the particular item, information indicative of terms of supply contracts that the enterprise has in effect for supply of the particular

item, and information indicative of price and/or availability terms by which the enterprise may procure the particular item from one or more external sources.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the enterprise comprises an enterprise having a plurality of business units, wherein the retrieved internal information includes information indicative of estimated demand within one or more of the business units of the enterprise for the particular item and information indicative of terms of supply contracts that the one or more business units of the enterprise have in effect for supply of the particular item.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein a user makes a procurement decision of the particular item for the enterprise with respect to a first business unit of the enterprise based on retrieved internal information that is indicative of estimated demand within a second business unit of the enterprise for the particular item and/or information indicative of terms of supply contracts that the second business unit of the enterprise has in effect for supply of the particular item.

23. The method of claim 1, wherein the recommendation includes a time parameter, wherein the purchase or non-purchase recommendation is provided for a particular time or time period.

24. The method of claim 1, wherein the first information and the second information are extracted in a plurality of forms, wherein for each type and form of first information and second information, the first information and second information are transformed to one or more common information forms prior to storage in the database, wherein external information external to the enterprise and internal information internal to the enterprise are retrievable from the database in response to one or more common queries to the database.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein the steps of extracting first information and second information are carried out at a plurality of times, wherein external information and internal information extracted at different points in time are stored in the database and are retrievable from the database in response to one or more common queries to the database.

26. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

receiving news information via one or more software modules, wherein the news information relates to the particular item or the one or more substitute items;

extracting via one or more software modules third information regarding the price and/or availability of the particular item; and

5 displaying an updated recommended decision regarding the procurement or non-procurement of the particular item and/or one or more substitute items.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the updated recommendation is displayed without prompting by the user.

10 28. The method of claim 27, wherein the user selected via software whether the updated recommendation would be displayed or not displayed without user intervention.

29. The method of claim 27, wherein the updated recommendation is provided in an alert window, wherein the alert window alerts the user visually of the updated recommendation.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the updated recommendation is accompanied by an audible alert.

15 31. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

extracting additional first and/or second information regarding the price or availability of the particular item and/or the one or more substitute items;

displaying at least selected portions of the first information and/or second information and/or at least selected portions of the additional first information and/or second information;

20 generating an updated recommendation regarding the procurement or non-procurement of the particular item and/or the one or more substitute items; and

displaying an updated recommendation regarding the procurement or non-procurement of the particular item and/or the one or more substitute items.

25 32. The method of claim 31, wherein the updated recommendation is displayed without prompting by the user.

33. The method of claim 32, wherein the user selected via software whether the updated recommendation would be displayed or not displayed without user intervention.

34. The method of claim 32, wherein the updated recommendation is displayed in an alert window, wherein the alert window alerts the user visually of the updated recommendation.

35. The method of claim 34, wherein the updated recommendation is accompanied by an audible alert.

5 36. The method of claim 1, wherein a software agent monitors changes in the first and/or second, wherein in response to changes in the first and/or second information, an updated recommendation is generated and displayed.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein the updated recommendation is displayed without prompting by the user.

10 38. The method of claim 37, wherein the user selected via software whether the updated recommendation would be displayed or not displayed without user intervention.

39. The method of claim 37, wherein the updated recommendation is displayed in an alert window, wherein the alert window alerts the user visually of the updated recommendation.

15 40. The method of claim 39, wherein the updated recommendation is accompanied by an audible alert.

41. The method of claim 4, wherein, in response to one or more queries to the database, external information and internal information are retrieved from the database, wherein the retrieved external and internal information are analyzed via one or more software modules.

20 42. The method of claim 9, wherein one or more software modules generate information indicative of an estimated loss from sales of the product.

43. The method of claim 2, wherein at least selected portions of the first information and/or second information to a user via a customizable user interface.